

Message Text

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CAPETOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: XA, CU, UR, MPOL
SUBJECT: SOVIET AND CUBAN ROLES IN AFRICA

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1. THE FMG'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE SOVIET AND CUBAN ROLE IN
AFRICAN IS FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF THE UNITED
STATES GOVERNMENT. SINCE THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN
ITS ANALYSES OF THE CUBAN AND SOVIET ROLES, WE BELIEVE IT IS
BEST TO ANALYZE THEM AS SEPARATE ISSUES, RELATING THE TWO
AS APPROPRIATE.

2. THE NIGERIANS DO NOT VIEW THE CUBANS AS SURROGATES FOR THE
SOVIETS. GENERALLY THEY SEE CUBA AS PLAYING AN INDEPENDENT,
PROGRESSIVE ROLE ON THE CONTINENT. CUBA IS A THIRD WORLD,
PARTIALLY BLACK AGRARIAN COUNTRY AND THEREFORE DOES NOT REPRESENT
THE THREAT WHICH A WHITE, POTENTIALLY COLONIALIST GREAT POWER
DOES WHEN IT INTERVENES. IN THE WORDS OF ONE NIGERIAN NEWSPAPER,
THE CUBANS "ARE ON AFRICAN SOIL AT THE EXPLICIT REQUEST OF
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LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENTS OF THE COUNTRIES THEY ARE NOW HELPING TO
CONSOLIDATE THEIR INDEPENDENCE." MOREOVER, IN THREE KEY AREAS -
SOUTHERN AFRICA, ANGOLA AND THE HORN - THE NIGERIANS HAVE FOUND
THE CUBANS ON THEIR SIDE OF MAJOR INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS.

3. IN SOUTHERN AFRICA THE CUBANS OFFER A POSITIVE FORCE FOR
CHANGE IF THE WEST FAILS TO MOVE THE WHITE LEADERS OF THE

REGION.

4. IN ANGOLA THE CUBANS STEPPED INTO SUPPORT THE MPLA WITH NIGERIA AT A TIME WHEN THE WEST, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY SOUTH AFRICA, WERE ARRAYED AGAINST IT. NIGERIANS ARE EMBARRASSED FOR ANGOLA AND FOR AFRICA THAT THE CUBAN ROLE CONTINUES TO BE SO CRITICAL FOR THE MAINTENANCE IN POWER OF THE MPLA, PARTICULARLY NOW THAT THE MAJOR THREAT TO LUANDA IS BLACK AND INTERNAL (SAVIMBI) RATHER THAN WHITE AND EXTERNAL, (SAG). THEY WISH NETO COULD RID HIMSELF OF THE CUBANS, BUT THEY RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CUBAN CONTRIBUTION ESPECIALLY IN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION. THE FMG IS THERE NOT WILLING, AT LEAST IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, TO PRESS NETO TO DO SOMETHING HE CANNOT DO.

5. ALTHOUGH NIGERIA ATTEMPTED TO PLAY A MEDIATOR'S ROLE IN THE RECENT HORN CONFLICT AND THEREFORE AVOIDED PUBLIC COMMENTS ON THE SUBJECT, THE FMG WAS PRIVATELY SYMPATHETIC TO ETHIOPIA. AGAIN, NIGERIANS DID NOT LIKE THE IDEA OF MEGISTU'S CALL FOR OUTSIDE HELP, BUT SOMALI AGGRESSION MADE IT PALATABLE. (BY THE SAME TOKEN THE FMG ACCEPTED MOBUTU'S CALL FOR OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE AFTER SHABA I. SHABA II IS A MORE DIFFICULT CASE FOR NIGERIANS BECAUSE OF THE GREATER EUROPEAN ROLE.) IF CUBANS WERE USED IN OBVIOUS WAYS AGAINST THE ERITREANS, NIGERIANS WOULD QUITE PROBABLY REEXAMINE THEIR POSTURE ON THE QUESTION. (ON THE OTHER HAND, THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT USED EGYPTIAN PILOTS AGAINST BIAFRA.)

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6. FINALLY WE WOULD NOTE THAT, IN NIGERIAN EYES, THE CUBANS MAY BE USEFUL AS A CATALYST TO ENCOURAGE THE WEST AND ESPECIALLY THE US TO EXERT PRESSURE ON THE WHITE REGIMES, WITHOUT PRODUCING THE SPECTRE OF US-SOVIET CONFRONTATION.

7. IF THE CUBANS WERE IN SPECIFIC AREAS TO ADOPT POSTURES WITH WHICH NIGERIA DISAGREED, ACCEPTANCE OF THEIR ACTIVISM WOULD BE FAR LESS WIDESPREAD. ONE SUCH POSSIBILITY WOULD BE IN BENIN, WHICH THE NIGERIANS VIEW WITH SOME CONCERN. IF THE GOVERNMENT IN COTONOU WERE TO PLAY A MORE AGGRESSIVE ROLE VIS-A-VIS ITS NEIGHBORS, WITH CUBAN SUPPORT, THE NIGERIAN CONCEPT OF THE CUBAN ROLE IN AFRICA WOULD CERTAINLY CHANGE.

8. DESPITE THE SLOGANS OF AFRICAN UNITY, FOREIGN POLICY MAKERS IN NIGERIA RECOGNIZE THE EXISTENCE OF DIVISIVE TRENDS WITHIN THE CONTINENT. SINCE THEY VIEW NIGERIA AS A PROGRESSIVE STATE, THEY TEND TO ATTRIBUTE THE PROBLEM OF DIVISIVENESS LARGELY TO THE CONSERVATIVE FRANCOPHONE STATES. IN THEIR VIEW THE DIVISIVE FORCE STEMS FROM THIS SOURCE AS MUCH AS FROM THE CUBAN PRESENCE.

9. THE NIGERIAN VIEW OF THE SOVIET ROLE IN AFRICA IS MORE AMBIVALENT THAN THEIR VIEW OF THE CUBAN ROLE. THE USSR IS A WHITE

SUPERPOWER AND ITS PRESENCE ON THE CONTINENT IS SEEN AS INTRODUCING CERTAIN DANGERS, NOT LEAST OF WHICH IS THE POSSIBILITY OF SOVIET/AMERICAN CONFRONTATION IN AFRICA. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE SOVIETS ASSISTED THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DURING CIVIL WAR WHEN THE US FAILED TO DO SO. IT IS TRUE THAT THE NIGERIANS, ESPECIALLY IN RECENT YEARS, HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THE REALITY OF SOVIET MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND THE NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE OF MANY IN THEIR AIR FORCE WHO HAVE WORKED WITH THE SOVIETS. NEVERTHELESS, THE NIGERIANS HAVE FOUND THE SOVIETS ON "THEIR SIDE" IN ANGOLA AND THE HORN. THE SOVIETS HAVE FOR A LONG TIME ALSO BEEN MORE ACTIVELY AND, FROM THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE POSITIVELY INVOLVED THAN THE US IN SUPPORTING SOUTHERN AFRICAN LIBERATION MOVEMENTS.

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10. THE PROBLEMS OF THE SOVIET PRESENCE IN NIGERIAN EYES ARE TIED TO THEIR SUSPICION OF THIS SUPERPOWER AND TO A CONCERN THAT TOO DEEP A SOVIET PRESENCE MIGHT STIR INAPPROPRIATE US INTERVENTION. (THE CUBANS, THEREFORE, ARE AN EXCELLENT FOIL FOR THIS CONCERN.) NIGERIAN POLICY-MAKERS ALSO REALIZE THAT SOVIET INFLUENCE MIGHT NOT ALWAYS BE EXERTED FOR CAUSES WHICH NIGERIA SUPPORTED.

11. THE NIGERIAN PRESCRIPTION FOR HANDLING THE SOVIET "PROBLEM" IS TO WATCH AND WAIT. NIGERIAN AMBIVALENCE TOWARD THE SOVIETS WOULD, OF COURSE RAPIDLY CHANGE IF MOSCOW BEGAN TO PURSUE POLICIES WHICH NIGERIA VIEWED AS ANTITHETICAL TO ITS OWN INTERESTS OR ITS DEFINITION OF AFRICAN INTERESTS.

12. THE NIGERIAN VIEW OF THE DIVISIVE ROLE OF THE SOVIETS IN AFRICA IS SIMILAR TO THEIR VIEW OF THE CUBANS. THE SOVIETS ARE SEEN AS SIDING WITH THE "PROGRESSIVE" STATES AND THEREFORE NOT CONSTITUTING A DIVISIVE FORCE.
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